

What's new

Girls

Work

Play

Entertainment

Technology

Sports

Health

Subscribe



Tipsy Turkey



Fanny Wang Custom Colors Headphones



Peanut Butter Lover's Month



It's Official: Demi Moore to Divorce Ashton Kutcher



Trendy Beer Cocktails



Welcome to Nuclear Winter, NBA Fans

We'll Find a Book Publisher For You in 3 Easy Steps.

1

Your Book

2

Your Goal

3

Contact

Start Now



Follow us on Twitter



Like us on Facebook

Mon, Mar 23 2009

Tweet

0

Like

[◀ Previous Post](#) | [Next Post ▶](#)

Successful Freelancer: Lisa Collier Cool

972 days ago by [Jenny Cromie](#) | [5 Comments](#) | [Share a Tip](#)

Good Monday morning readers!

Today, I'm shining the spotlight on [Lisa Collier Cool](#), a best-selling author and winner of 18 journalism awards. She's written more than 400 articles for the Associated Press, Cosmopolitan, Family Circle, Fitness, Glamour, Good Housekeeping, Harper's, Hallmark, Harper's Bazaar, Health, Health Monitor, Ladies Home Journal, Marie Claire, O the Oprah Magazine, Parenting, Parents, Penthouse, Publishers Weekly, Redbook, Reader's Digest, Self, Woman's

Day, *Writer's Digest* and many others .

Lisa also is a prolific author. Her book, *Beware the Night: A New York City Cop Investigates the Supernatural* (with coauthor Ralph Sarchie), reached #3 on the Amazon bestseller list, and #10 on Ingram's bestseller list. Movie rights from the book also were sold to Jerry Bruckheimer at Disney Pictures. Lisa also has written several other books, including *Bad Boys: Why We Love Them, How To Live With Them, When To Leave Them* (with Carole Lieberman, M.D.); *How to Give Good Phone*; *How to Write Irresistible Query Letters*; and *How to Sell Every Magazine Article You Write*.

Lisa also is past president of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, and currently serves on the organization's board of directors. She also is chair of the board of trustees of the Writers Emergency Fund.

Lisa has appeared on more than 100 radio talk shows in the United States and abroad, as well as on numerous television shows, including the *Early Show*, *Good Housekeeping Reports*, *Good Morning America* and *Hard Copy*. Before becoming a freelance writer, Lisa worked as a literary agent, and sold more than 400 books, many of them bestsellers.



How long have you freelanced? How did you get your start ?

I became a freelancer in 1984 after the birth of my twins, Alison and Georgia. Previously, I was a literary agent in NYC, but wanted a job that let me work at home and be with my kids. When I was an agent, I used to write part time, so had accumulated both contacts and credits before I made the jump to full-time freelancing.

I understand you used to be a literary agent (for what agency?). How long did you work as a literary agent, and what made you decide to start writing?

Had you always written? What did being a literary agent teach you about writing?

I had my own agency, Collier Associates, which I started at age 23. Previously, I was an assistant at another agency my father ran with his former business partner. Then he was offered a great job at a publishing company, so he turned the business over to me. I was an agent for 8 years. As an agent, I learned that what separates successful writers from the rest is that they are better marketers. I sold books by writers whose skills seemed marginal at best—and watched them become giant sellers, because these authors were masterful at packaging their ideas to sell. Finding the right spin on your concept, and having a nose for news and what's hot, are also key.

I was always interested in writing. At age 9, I had a letter to the editor published in *Ladies Home Journal*. My mom subscribed to all the women's magazines, so I started reading them too. I guess it was my destiny to write for *LHJ*,

Most Viewed

Picture: Kristen Stewart Naked in "On the Road"

It's Official: Demi Moore to Divorce Ashton Kutcher

Sexiest, Sluttiest Disney Princesses

Comments And Spammers

HTC Inspire 4G Review – iPhone Killer?

Pictures: Nicki Minaj Nipple Slip Pics

Picture: Taylor Swift Topless Picture Leaked?

Notorious B.I.G. Wax Figure Unveiled

Joe Flacco Agrees to Contract With Ravens

Pictures: Mila Kunis – Best Dressed at 2011 Oscars

Sponsored Links



Black Friday Leaked Ads

SignUp to Get all the Black Friday Leaked Ads & Best Doorbus...
BlackFriday2011.com



The New MOTOACTV™

The Ultimate Fusion Of Fitness + Music.

because its one of my best markets these days. In 6th grade, I won a regional essay contest, writing on “What My Flag Means to Me.” I was proud and thrilled to not only get a \$25 U.S. savings bond as my prize, but also to be invited to read my essay at a Memorial Day event that was broadcast on the local radio station. I felt incredibly lucky! My father was a tremendous mentor to me and encouraged me to write.

On your Web site, there’s a quote from an article in The Writer that says: “Lisa Collier Cool has a clip file that reads like the magazine rack at Barnes & Noble.” Most people don’t start out with national credits and glowing reviews like that. Can you talk a little bit about where you started from and how you got to where you are today?

I made my first sale in 1976. It was an election year and I learned of a group of Libertarians who were waging a fake campaign, with the slogan, “Vote for Nobody, because Nobody keeps his campaign promises.” I thought that was interesting and with the help of my father, the literary agent, I found a newspaper syndicate that offered me \$35 to write a 500 word piece on spec. When they accepted the story, I did other stories for them until one day I thought, “Maybe, just maybe, there is someone out there who pays MORE than \$35.” Turns out there was.

I sent queries to all sorts of magazines and sold a tiny piece to *Harper’s Magazine*, which added a lot of luster to my bio. Soon after becoming a full-time freelancer, I landed a contributing editor gig at *Cosmopolitan*, which bought dozens of articles from me. From there I branched out to other women’s magazines and later *Reader’s Digest*, another of my childhood favorites.

You’ve written several books, including a few about freelance writing. Based on your years in the business and all the advice you’ve dispensed in your books, what are the top three things that freelancers need to know? And what are some myths they need to stop buying into?

I’m a huge believer in persistence. When I was an agent, one book I was marketing was rejected by 40 publishers, but I made yet another round of submissions and got 3 offers. The book went on to become a bestseller. That taught me not to give up on something I felt was salable. Another tip I often offer is to that the best way to get an editor’s attention is to punch her in the nose—with your first paragraph. A good query has to grab editors right away or they may never read the second paragraph.

Also you need to shrug off rejection and immediately resubmit your pitch if someone says no. I once got discouraged after several editors turned down one of my queries—all for the same reason. But I brainstormed with a writer friend who suggested sending it to *Parents Magazine*, a market I’d never tried before. Not only did *Parents* buy it, but the story went on to win an award. Networking with other writers is very powerful and has helped advance my career dramatically over the years.

One myth is that after a certain point, there’s not much else you can learn from other freelancers. But the most successful writer I know, Cec Murphey, who has written 112 books, including bestsellers that have each sold millions of copies, told me recently that early in his career, he made 2 promises: to never stop learning about writing and to do everything in his power to help others. There’s always ways to improve your work and take it to



Get Free 2 Day Shipping Now:
www.Motorola.com/MOTOACTV



HYATT
SUMMERFIELD
SUITES

Hyatt Summerfield Suites®

All Suites Hotel with a Full Kitchen. Free
Breakfast & Wi-Fi. Book Now.
Hyatt.com/SummerfieldSuites

[Buy a link here](#)



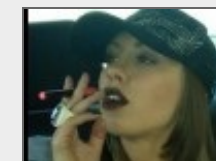
**57-Year-Old Mom
Looks 25**

Seattle: Local Mom
Exposes an Anti-Aging
Miracle. Her \$5 Trick...

Download your
FREE REPORT
for 1,000% gains

Free Stock Report

Earn 1,000% On The Next
Internet Boom.



**1 Tip of an Ex-
Smoker.**

Cut down smoking habits

the next level if you're open to new approaches. I also look for new tools I can turn to profit. For example, I now find anecdotes for articles through social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as e-blasts to my personal writer's query list of 500 contacts who help me find sources. (Most of these contacts are publicists who have sent me press releases over the years.)

I know that you have typically written a lot of articles for consumer magazines. Now that we're experiencing this economic downturn, what are you noticing in terms of your own workflow? Have you noticed work slowing down? If so, how are you combating that and changing your business model? Are you employing any new tactics that you would recommend for other freelancers?

It's a lot more work to get work than it used to be. I'm also finding that editors are more cautious about committing to an assignment, so now when I write a query, I take extra steps to rejection-proof it, such as suggesting 2 or 3 ways I could do the piece. I might propose a profile of a certain person, but also say that I could do a roundup of 3 women who have dealt with that issue. I suggest an interesting box, and point out that idea could even be a separate article.

That way, if they don't like the approach I initially propose, they can see other ways to make it work. Also, I don't take no for an answer. If someone says my story isn't a good fit for their demographic, I e-mail back a solution or facts showing why the topic IS relevant for their readers. If they say there's not enough service, then I propose flipping the topic to focus on that, or send a different idea full of practical tips. Recently, an editor at *Woman's Day* rejected my pitch because she felt the person I wanted to write about had gotten too much national publicity. I shot back a reply describing something new the woman was doing that would be quite inspiring to readers drowning in bad news about the recession—and landed a \$3,000 assignment.

I am also doing more stories for custom magazines. They pay less per word, but the hassle factor is lower and the pay prompter.

Have you freelanced during previous recessions? If so, how is this one different? How have you adjusted your businesses to current conditions? Did you see this decline coming, or has it been more rapid than you expected?

I have freelanced during earlier recessions, but the impact on me personally was far less than with the current crisis. That may be because magazines weren't competing with the Internet then, so even though some of my markets folded, it was easier to replace them with others that were still assigning. Since the start of the year, the downturn has been more drastic than I expected, but I am working harder, marketing more aggressively, following up faster, getting more pitches out, and it's starting to pay off. I always have lots of ideas so I've been more diligent about getting them out quickly and broadly. That includes making multiple submissions of timely ideas.

Right now, we're witnessing the rapid decline of the newspaper industry. Do you think the magazine industry is headed in the same direction? Where is the industry headed, and how will current conditions impact magazine writers?

every week by simply following this 1 weird...

Ads by pulse360

Featured Video

Video: Beavis and Butthead 2011 First Episode

I have an optimistic nature, but I have to be realistic. I'm very concerned about the magazine industry, with some of the giants toppling or looking wobbly. Writers have to be very nimble and adept at marketing to survive in this environment. Some won't. The magazine world is shrinking, so we have to target additional markets, which could include corporate work, being a writing coach, or creating Web content.

You've written so many different articles on such a wide variety of topics. How would you characterize your writing? Would you say that you have several specialties or do you consider yourself a generalist? Which is more advantageous for a freelancer—to be a specialist or a generalist?

My main focus is health reporting, but I also like to write dramatic narratives and profiles. I've also done personal finance and travel stories recently. For me, it's been more profitable to have a specialty. I've added a new one lately by writing celebrity health profiles. Previously, I'd only done one celebrity story.

What is the best piece of advice that you ever received as a freelancer? As a small business owner?

The best advice was Cec Murphey telling me to never stop learning about writing and to help others. I believe in paying it forward. As a small business owner, I donate to charity. I'm chair of the board of trustees of ASJA's Writers Emergency Assistance Fund, a registered 501(c)(3) charity. Donations are fully tax-deductible and aid professional writers facing hardship due to illness, disability, natural disaster, advanced age or an extraordinary crisis. To donate, download a grant application, or find out more about this worthy cause, run by volunteers, go to www.weaf.org.

The annual ASJA Writers Conference is coming up next month, and as you know, finances are tight for many freelancers right now. That said, why is this year's conference a good investment for writers and freelancers? What will people walk away with knowledge-wise if they attend?

It's a great investment for several reasons. In this difficult climate, networking with editors and other writers is especially important. Not only have I made tens of thousands of dollars through editorial contacts made at the ASJA conference over the years, but at one conference I met an ASJA member who regularly speaks on six-figure freelancer panels. She's become one of my best friends and we talk on the phone almost every day about our ideas, new markets to try, how to solve creative problems that crop up while writing our articles, and much more. That's resulted in both of us making a lot more money and sales. Just meeting that one person has more than paid for a lifetime of conferences.

What are the top three mistakes that freelancers and small business owners tend to make? What about in this business climate?

Some freelancers don't spend enough time marketing. When you have a few assignments, there's a temptation to stop pitching and focus on getting the pieces done. But that can lead to lack of work down the road, particularly in this daunting environment. I send out new pitches every Monday, as well as resubmitting old ones. I also go on

idea hunts—for me, one of the most exciting things to find a great story. It's also important to keep yourself on the editors' radar. Since I live near NYC, I go to ASJA evening programs to make new contacts and reconnect with former customers. Not only are these programs webcast free to ASJA members all over the world, but nonmembers can download them for \$10 apiece at the [ASJA store](#). There's a ton of terrific market information in these programs—and I should know, because I'm chair of ASJA's Program Committee.

You also have to get out of your comfort zone. I'm pitching markets I never tried before as well as old ones. I developed a letter of introduction to send to custom publishers. I'm a bit of technophobe, but this year, I finally created and launched [my Web site](#). And I did it entirely by trial-and-error, using iWeb. You have to be nimble to adapt to these conditions.

After launching my Web site, I read [an excellent article in the Wall Street Journal](#) about how to boost your search engine ranking. I followed the tips, and my Web site zoomed from not even being in the first 30 results for googling my name in quotes to #2 if you Google my name without quotes. The most helpful tip is to plaster your URL on as many sites as possible, especially on LinkedIn and Facebook.

You have a book called *How to Sell Every Magazine Article That You Write*. Is that even possible anymore or have times changed? Given current economic conditions, are there additional pieces of advice that you'd offer, but that weren't covered in the book?

I still sell every article I write, because I always write the query first. If it doesn't snag an assignment, then I don't write the article. I sell about 50 percent of my queries. My best advice to freelancers is to form a brainstorming/goal buddy group with a few colleagues. I did that with 7 writers I respect, including my best ASJA friend, and we share market information, brainstorm about where to submit our queries, vent about problems, share our goals for the week, and support and encourage each other during these difficult times. It's been extremely valuable for all of us.

I've discovered new tools I can turn to profit. For example, I now find anecdotes for articles through social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as through e-blasts to my personal writer's query list of 500 contacts who help me find sources, such as publicists I know. Also, I think about ways I can use the recession as a news hook for stories, such as a recent *Woman's Day* article I did titled, "Can You Afford a Vacation?"

Sponsored Links



The New MOTOACTV™

The Ultimate Fusion Of Fitness + Music. Get Free 2 Day Shipping Now!
www.Motorola.com/MOTOACTV



Black Friday Leaked Ads

SignUp to Get all the Black Friday Leaked Ads & Best Doorbuster Deals!
BlackFriday2011.com



Hyatt Summerfield Suites®

All Suites Hotel with a Full Kitchen. Free Breakfast & Wi-Fi. Book Now.
Hyatt.com/SummerfieldSuites

[Buy a link here](#)

YOU MIGHT LIKE



Kim Kardashian
Getting Divorced,
Still Hot
([MadeMan](#))



George Romero
Hints That New
Zombie Film Will
Be 'Medically
Correct'
([Word and Film](#))



Hair Styles for
Older Women
([Style Goes Strong](#))



Maksim
Chmerkovskiy
Takes Dariya
Chesnokova Out
to Dinner: New
Girlfriend Alert?
([Wetpaint
Entertainment](#))



Unbelievable:
Halle Berry
Celebrated Her
45th Birthday in a
Bikini
([Zimbio](#))

[?]

Around The Web



10 Coolest Inventions of the Year



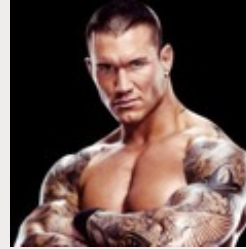
Only The Blind Won't Notice This! It's Impossible No To Spot That!



Beautiful And Gorgeous, But...



It's Always Noticeable And Intriguing



Backstage Heat On Randy Orton

Share This Post:



Related Topics: [Work](#)

Comments



By [Jennifer L](#)
970 days ago

Terrific interview. Thanks so much for doing this one. Hey, anyone want to form a brainstorming writers' group?



By [Jennifer](#)
970 days ago

Out of the many interviews I've read with freelance writers, she honestly seems the most resourceful. Thanks for this!



By [Jenny Cromie](#)
971 days ago

Thanks Alisa and Sheri! I also find Lisa inspiring as well. And not surprisingly, she provided a lot of great advice here.



By [Sheri Bell-Rehwoldt](#) Lisa is an inspiration to writers!
971 days ago

I've posted a link to this wonderful article on my writers blog,
<http://sherionwriting.blogspot.com/>.

Thanks, Jenny. ;-)

Sheri



By [Alisa Bowman](#)
972 days ago

Jenny—this was a really inspiring piece. Just what I needed to start my morning feeling motivated. As an ASJA member, I've been aware of the wonders of Lisa for a while, but this really allowed me to get to know her. What a wonderful piece! I love the takeaway about always learning and paying it forward. I think I just might steal that mantra and live it myself.

Reply
Reply
Reply
Reply
Reply

Post a Comment



Your Name (required):

Your Email (required but will not be published):

Your Comment:

Post Comment

Notify me of follow-up comments via e-mail

Download your
FREE REPORT
for 1,000% gains

Earn 1,000% On
The Next Internet
Boom.
[Get details...](#)



Cut down smoking
habits every week
by simply following
this 1 weird...
[Get details...](#)



Which penny stocks
can jump 2100%
and more? We'll tell
you,...
[Get details...](#)

Advertisement

